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The Queer Tourist in 'Straight' (?) Space: Sexual Citizenship in Provincetown

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Abstract: Provincetown, Massachusetts USA, a rural out-of-the-way coastal village at the tip of Cape Cod with a year-round population of approximately 3,500, has 'taken off' since the late 1980s as a popular GLBTQ tourist destination. Long tolerant of sexual minorities, Provincetown transitioned from a Portuguese-dominated fishing village to a popular 'queer' gay resort mecca, as the fishing industry deteriorated drastically over the twentieth century. Today Provincetowners rely mainly on tourists—both straight and gay—who enjoy the seaside charm, rustic ambience, and a healthy dose of non-heteronormative performance content, in this richly diverse tourist milieu. As Provincetown's popularity as a GLBTQ tourist destination increased throughout the 1980s and '90s, new forms of "sexual outlaw" lifestyles, including the leather crowd and the gay men's "tourist circuit," have appeared in Provincetown, which challenge heteronormative standards, social propriety rules, and/or simply standards of "good taste," giving rise to moral outrage and even at times an apparent homophobic backlash. This conduct interrogates how far citizens are willing to go to tolerate non-heteronormative (and at times outlaw) sexual conduct, produced by sexual minorities whose lifestyle is on the edge of the law and sometimes outside it altogether. This paper will analyze sexual tourism in Provincetown, to interrogate sexual citizenship, and both contradictions and possibilities for overcoming the sexual divide.

Keywords: Gender, Citizenship, Diversity

PROVINCETOWN, MASSACHUSETTS, A rural out-of-the-way coastal village at the tip of Cape Cod with a year-round population of approximately 3,500, has 'taken off' since the late 1980s as a popular GLBT tourist destination. Long tolerant of sexual minorities, Provincetown transitioned from a Portuguese-dominated fishing village to a popular 'queer' gay resort mecca, as the fishing industry deteriorated drastically over the twentieth century. Today Provincetowners rely mainly on tourists—both straight and gay—who enjoy the seaside charm, rustic ambience, and a healthy dose of non-heteronormative performance, in this richly diverse tourist milieu.

As Provincetown's popularity as a GLBT tourist destination increased throughout the 1980s and '90s, new forms of "sexual outlaw" lifestyles, including the leather crowd and the gay men's "tourist circuit," have surfaced in Provincetown. These new forms of "queer" public life sometimes challenge heteronormative standards, social propriety rules, and/or simply standards of "good taste," giving rise to moral outrage and even at times an apparent homophobic backlash. Sometimes randy and sexually rebellious, sexual tourism in Provincetown interrogates how far citizens are willing to go to tolerate non-heteronormative (and at times outlaw) sexual conduct, produced by a sexual minority constituency whose lifestyle is on the edge of the law and sometimes outside it altogether. This paper will analyze how sexual tourism in Provincetown becomes an issue of sexual citizen-

ship rights generally, fostering both contradictions and possibilities for overcoming the sexual divide.

Sexual Minorities, Cultural Citizenship, and Human Rights

In Provincetown, as nowhere else, gay/straight intersections are part of the ebb and flow of daily life. Where else would Miss Universe be greeted by town officials accompanied by three drag queens in full regalia? That is exactly the greeting given Brooke Lee, 1999 Miss Universe and formerly Miss Hawaii, by Pearlene, Ginger Vitus, and Honey West, who escorted the dignitary along Commercial Street with town manager Keith Bergman. Dressed in high heels, well-coiffed hairdos, and plenty of make-up, the trio "didn't even bat an elongated eyelash when [town manager] Bergman proclaimed Lee 'Queen for the day.'" Tourists, delighted by the performance, snapped photos as Miss Universe hugged and greeted the "queens" (Miller 1999).

This episode is typical of Provincetown's 'queer' non- or anti-heteronormative ambience. "Queer" is transgressive because, by asserting identity as difference, "queer" interrupts notions of a unified gay or lesbian identity, or the hetero-homosexual binary (see Seidman 1995:185, 1998; see also Butler 1990; Fuss 1991; De Laurentis 1991). In Provincetown where sexual "others" bring onto the streets the risqué flamboyance of drag, the risky sex of late night trysts between gay men, and the randy culture

of leathers and S & Ms, individual rights intersect—and often clash—with imperatives of collective social responsibility. These intersections interrogate the limits of both individual liberty and social responsibility, or in other words public good versus private rights (see Mouffe 1992:238). Mouffe (1992:238) says, “We cannot say: here end my duties as a citizen and begins my freedom as an individual. Those two identities exist in a permanent tension that can never be reconciled.” Provincetown is an important site where “queer” culture is manifest in daily life, and where individual citizenship rights and responsibilities can be critically analyzed.

As sexual citizens, Provincetown’s gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and other “queers” interrogates citizenship boundaries, not only in political, civic, and social dimensions, but also in the domains of what Pakulski (1997:77) calls cultural citizenship. “Cultural rights,” according to Pakulski, are “the rights to unhindered and dignified representation, as well as to the maintenance and propagation of distinct cultural identities and lifestyles.” Cultural citizenship is a radical form of cultural democracy predicated upon a universal politics of recognition, rooted in tolerance of diverse identities. The imperative of full cultural citizenship, then, is acceptance of diversity and inclusiveness (see also Seidman 1995:135). Weeks (1999:36-37) argues that the transgressive content of “queer” interrogates notions of citizenship generally:

[C]ontained in these movements is also a claim to inclusion, to the acceptance of diversity, and a recognition of and respect for alternative ways of being, to a broadening of the definition of belonging. This is the moment of citizenship: the claim to equal protection of the law, to equal rights in employment, parenting, social status, access to welfare provision, and partnership rights, or even marriage, for same sex couples

Conflicts across Provincetown’s sexual divide interrogate citizenship in two ways. First, How far are citizens willing to go to tolerate sexual minorities, and in what forms? Will Provincetowners permit discrete sexual trysts among gay men at the so-called “dick dock” or other out of the way venues? Will Provincetowners endorse nudity in theatrical performances, the arts, and adult entertainment, such as a musical review called “Naked Boys Singing” performed at the Crown & Anchor Hotel in the early 2000s? Or, will Provincetowners tolerate only so-called “good gay citizens” (see Stein 2001) whose sexual lifestyle remains discretely private?

Second, as Provincetown shifts demographically from mostly straight to mostly gay, how will the community accommodate this new sexual culture,

dominated by non-heteronormative social and sexual standards? These questions, in this instance framed as issues of “sexual citizenship,” have wider implications for citizenship generally. For example, sexual minorities of color, too, are embraced so long as they behave as “good black citizens.” Jamaican dreadlocks, street speech, and rap music peppered with profanities are unacceptable. Sexual minorities similarly query how far community members are willing to go to allow them full citizenship status. Can a community like Provincetown embrace democratic citizenship principles to include “others” whose lifestyles do not accord with mainstream, heteronormative, white, social and cultural standards and norms? This is the dilemma of democratic pluralistic citizenship for communities like Provincetown as marginalized minorities become majorities.

In other United States urban and suburban communities, like Oak Park, Illinois, or Maplewood, New Jersey, gay men and lesbians have been integrated so long as they, like suburban middle class African Americans, exhibit middle class mainstream lifestyles as parents and home-owners. Gay and lesbian Oak Parkers do not flaunt their sexual status, but rather embrace a mainstream middle class “family values” lifestyle (see Ruby 2000). Just as African American suburbanites typically do not wear dreadlocks, listen to rap music, or affiliate with the black power movement, suburban gay men and lesbians leave their alternate sexualities behind, whether they be drag queens or leather dykes. Vaid (1995; see also Berlant and Warner 1998; Bell 1995) argues that this kind of sexual mainstreaming, like African American or Native American assimilation into United States “white” culture, is predicated on a negative, stigmatized view of queer culture as aberrant and threatening to the social order. Assimilation, argues Vaid, succeeds when sexual or racial minorities embrace majority cultural traits and social values, and distance themselves from non-heteronormative social or sexual conduct. To fully assimilate then, we must become “like white heterosexuals” in behavior, dress, and demeanor.

The Non-ordinariness of ‘Queer’

Like San Francisco’s Castro District, Provincetown has embraced artistic and sexual non- or anti-heteronormativity, and even some aspects of “sexual outlaw” culture. The sexual culture of gay men in particular, with its bawdy, risqué sexuality, has become a basic feature of Provincetown’s street theatre, prominently displayed by drag queens, leathers, and more recently the muscle crowd, throughout the busy summer tourist season, which climaxes with the so-called Carnival Parade in mid-August. This feature of the town’s queer community—its “out” queer

sexual culture—is both a site of a transformative radical democratic citizenship and a site of intense social discord over individual and collective citizenship rights boundaries. As Provincetown confronts another threat: economic gentrification—which may render daily living impossible for all but the most well-to-do citizens—boundary-breaking behaviors linked to sexual “outlaws” become metaphors for the town’s social and cultural divide.

“Queer” and Straight Intersections

Provincetown is in many ways characterized by what Alyssa Howe (1998:4) calls “radical irreverence,” especially during the summer tourist season. Like San Francisco’s Castro district, Provincetowners—especially tourists—exhibit an “irreverence for dominant notions of home and heteronormativity, what might now be called ‘family values.’” Queer culture in Provincetown is located at multiple sites—gay, lesbian, and straight bars, Herring Cove Beach (with gay male, lesbian, and straight spaces), cross-dressing performance sites, clubs, theatres, and on the streets. Queer is also rendered in cartoons, billboard displays, and at commercial establishments selling sexy undergarments and sex toys. Social boundaries are expanded by many “in your face” encounters that bring gender transgressors and straights together in an annual round of activities across the spectrum of community institutions and social settings. For some locals, the ambience is circus-like; others savor the diversity and celebrate their own permission to be “themselves” like no other place in the world. The uses of Provincetown’s public spaces reveal a dynamic struggle to accommodate sexual “others” whose claims for full citizenship status are not only political and economic, but also social and cultural, frequently challenging social norms and sensibilities. Public venues, then, are intermittently contentious sites of social group intersections, especially when sexual outlaw culture challenges heteronormative ideals and practices.

Provincetown, it seems, gives people permission to be outrageous in dress or demeanor, or to live vicariously through the camp culture around them. Some straight couples, no less outrageous than their “gender transgressive” counterparts, arrive dressed in Harley Davidson leathers or hippie costumes straight out of the ‘60s. “Queer” culture embraces everyone, and members move freely and comfortably in each other’s spaces. Straight year rounders, such as Tony and Pat, said they often go to gay bars in the off-season, particularly the A-House, and never feel threatened by the predominantly homosexual crowd (author’s interviews 1995-1998). Provincetown’s drag culture routinely spills out onto the street, especially during the summer tourist season,

when female impersonators strut their stuff to draw crowds to their shows. Typical of Provincetown’s streets, by day, Cub Scouts march by the former Stormy Harbor Café in a July 4th parade, and at night, the corner comes alive with drag theatre.

Drag Brunch at the Café Blasé in late August, or Drag Bingo at the Unitarian Church, like so many local events, serve dual purposes: to both entertain and raise funds for many local causes, ranging from AIDS to high school scholarships. Drag Brunch was organized in the early 1990s by Billy Miller at the Café Blasé to honor the local workforce and raise funds for the Provincetown AIDS Support Group (PASG). Today the event attracts more than one hundred drag queens and ‘fellow travelers,’ and, of course, an enthusiastic audience of spectators. Camp or drag in Provincetown “lighten up” the audience to sexually transgressive counter-heteronormativity, and thereby render queer politics through counter-heteronormative activism. Drag queens are Provincetown’s true sexual radicals who “break the ice” with straights, as for example, when straight women hover around drag queens to be photographed cradled in “her” voluptuous bosom.

Personal exposure to diverse sexualities ranging from flamboyant cross dressers and drag queens to gay men, lesbians, offers durable lessons in sexual diversity for locals and visitors alike. Locals know that not all gay men are cross-dressers, nor are drag queens the same as transsexuals. By mainstreaming sexual diversity Provincetown has become a site of generalized community awareness of the complex nature of sexual diversity. These sophisticated understandings do not, however, make group borders transparent, nor do they guarantee that social encounters will always be harmonious or free of conflict.

Conflicts across the Sexual Divide

For year rounders, steeped in heteronormativity and at times homophobic, Provincetown’s reputation as a sexually transgressive tourist mecca challenges mainstream sensibilities and middle class values. When mainstream (i.e. heterosexual) cultural norms are breached, as they often are, flashpoints of conflict arise and group members rally to protect the normalcy of social spaces and the image of their “imagined community.” Locals, then, live a kind of schizophrenic life, integrated on the one hand into heteronormative cultural institutions, norms, and values, and the work-a-day world of jobs and family. Folks work to raise children, provide for their families, and live as socially responsible citizenry. On the other hand is a radically unconventional community life which swirls around them, dramatically at odds with mainstream U.S. cultural norms. One result is that Provincetowners respond to sexual boundary

transgressions with a libertarian 'live and let live' philosophy, as they struggle to be 'normal.' Provincetown's reputation as a gay tourist mecca and sexual playground, touted in gay tourist media, newspaper accounts, and websites, brings on risky behavior, including sexual permissiveness, drunkenness, violence, and drug abuse, earlier noted among gay men. This 'anything goes' atmosphere of sex, fun and sun, just one aspect of the town's identity, produces a disjuncture among locals between the ideal and real.

Self-expression in Provincetown, displayed through the arts, dress, demeanor, and popular culture, are often glossed in sexual images, messages, and metaphors. Sexual content, sometimes explicit, is a feature of store window displays, newspaper ads, public performances, theatre, art exhibits, and even impromptu events. When levels of tolerance are breached, artistically or otherwise, locals clash over familiar issues of social propriety and acceptability. Said Burns (1996a), "Some see Provincetown as a synonym for self-expression while others see it as a town where public tolerance is often tested." The media, police, arts, and theatre serve as sites where debates between acceptable and extreme are contested.

Since the mid-1990s, Provincetown has seen clashes in diverse social arenas, from the bars to the beaches, over sexually transgressive conduct. In 1995 the Crown & Anchor Inn was charged with "simulated sex acts" in its Back Room bar. The Provincetown Licensing Board in June, 1996, voted to restrict the audience for Karen Finley's performance, "American Chestnut," to adults over eighteen, because her performance contained some nudity, a vote the board later rescinded (Burns 1996b). In that same year, 1996, a quilt produced by artist Jenny Humphreys displayed at the Berta Walker Gallery created a local furor because it featured "a four letter word for a vagina" on each square. In the following year, a photo exhibit at the Provincetown Art Association and Museum which included a controversial photo by Jason Bryan Gavann of a sexually aroused male, prompted local artists Constance Black and Peter Silva to withdraw their art from the exhibit (*The [Provincetown] Advocate* 1997). Newspaper and display ads circulated throughout town for the Atlantic House or the Crown & Anchor routinely feature gorgeous males dressed in scanty g-strings.

In 1997 a lesbian assistant kindergarten teacher placed a gay and lesbian newspaper in a child's backpack during a school outing to the local library, at a time when attempts to adopt an anti-bias curriculum provoked unanticipated and virulent homophobia. A spate of anti-gay sentiments were voiced at a closed-door meeting held to air this and other school-related issues (Miller 1997b). That same year

complaints following the opening of Fetish Chest, an adult sex paraphernalia retailer, prompted the store owners to remove sexually explicit items from the store window. The board of selectmen was obliged to affirm that the store was "a perfectly legal business" (Newman 1997:24). In 1998 the town's licensing board, backed by wide community support, turned away a proposal to open an adult video arcade, fearing that the shop would make the community vulnerable to a 'red light district.' This was in spite of the fact that several Commercial Street businesses already sold X-rated videos and sex paraphernalia. These issues were widely debated in the town's then-two newspapers and on the streets, and were frequent subjects of satirical cartoons and editorial commentary.

The Gay Male Tourist Scene: "Sex, Sun and Fun"

In Provincetown the conduct of gay men, particularly summer tourists, even more than lesbians, often challenges social propriety boundaries and dramatically marks fundamental cultural differences between gay male and hetero-normative sexual styles. Gay male sexuality is often a lightning rod for inter-group conflict, when social propriety boundaries are breached. With the summer tourist season in full swing, some gay men can be found engaging in risky sex, drinking, and drugging. Like their counterparts who congregate at Fire Island's Cherry Grove resort and elsewhere (see Newton 1993; see also Bell and Valentine 1995; Ingram, Bouthilllette and Retter 1997), gay men haunt local spaces for sexual encounters, sometimes taking over formerly straight spaces and affronting the sensibilities of neighbors and newcomers. Sexual trysts in back streets or alleys have long been a part of gay male culture generally, particularly where legitimate spaces for private sexual trysts are off limits due to economic or cultural factors (Gleason 1999; see also Lumsden 1996; Leap 1999). Gleason (1999: 255ff) and others (author's interviews 1995-2000) reported that sexual trysts between gay men have defined Provincetown's gay male life at least since the 1960s. Popular hangouts over the decades have included a local beach in the West End behind Flyer's Boatyard called the "Dick Dock," and the secluded spaces behind the Pilgrim bus relief on Bradford Street. Until taken over by gay men, West End beaches were popular neighborhood swimming and picnicking spots; and today old timers complain that they no longer feel comfortable bringing their children or grandchildren to these waterfront areas, many now located adjacent to gay-owned guesthouses. Gay men also trek to Herring Cove Beach for sometimes risky sexual encounters, although the area, patrolled by Forest Ser-

vice park rangers, has historically been the target of crackdowns (author's interviews, 1995-2002).

Cruising for sex is a pastime for many gay male tourists. One late June weekend in 1995, two hundred men congregated behind the Flyer's boat yard, a popular late night cruising area. At Herring Cove Beach, said Gleason (1999:256, 262), "[t]he high season is, of course, the busiest season and when walking along the beach men can be seen at all hours of the day walking through the scrub of the tall dunes by the road or standing in the barrier dunes, scanning the beach and advertising their presence." Risky sex also is engaged in at private parties, such as a July 4th weekend "orgy" described by Gleason. "As the party progressed, guests disappeared into a bedroom next to the bathroom, presumably to do cocaine, K or X [the "club drugs" kketamine and ecstasy], have sex, or a combination of the two."

Boundary breaking behaviors by gay men, although not illegal, sometimes rile locals, who often feel that gays are taking over their community. Locals frequently complain about illicit sex and public nudity by gay men, sometimes charging that local police selectively enforce such conduct. Many locals object to gay men displaying 'bare buns,' a permissible activity so long as genitals are not exposed. Donna, interviewed in 1996, recounted an episode she experienced a couple of years earlier, and displays sentiments frequently heard among straights: that social propriety boundaries are crossed by gays, mostly gay male tourists, who act inappropriately in public and challenge even liberal sensibilities.

I took my daughter [and her friend] for fireworks. They must have been about four or five [years old], and we all went down one avenue or the other. Right in front of us was this guy with the whole back of his pants cut out with his butt hanging out. They're four or five years old!

'Mommy, Mommy Look!'

I'm like, 'You Pig!' You know you want to just slap somebody like that. That's unnecessary! You know, Fourth of July. There's children everywhere. When you're having your little things, you're in the bars, you do what you want, but not on the street like that, because I know if I went downtown with my breast hanging out I'd be in jail.

Charges of gay men 'hitting on youth' are also sometimes made, and although criminal prosecutions are rare, in 1997 two individuals including a Provincetown patrolman were charged with sex crimes and one was convicted of child rape (author's interviews, 1995-2001).

Tolerance and the Sexual Divide

Sexually transgressive conduct has in many ways been routinized in Provincetown, rendering the community "queer" space. This does not mean, however, that in Provincetown 'anything goes.' Provincetowners have set their sexual tolerance limits higher than elsewhere, even tolerating discrete public sex. In doing so, Provincetowners have expanded citizenship boundaries to embrace some cultural citizenship rights of sexual minorities, even so-called sexual outlaws.

As Provincetowners confront the limits of their own sexual tolerance, they face three dilemmas. First is the problem of achieving full cultural citizenship for all citizens, including sexual minorities (see Pakulski 1997:83). Cultural citizenship, says Pakulski, "involves the right to be 'different', to re-value stigmatized identities, to embrace openly and legitimately hitherto marginalized lifestyles and to propagate them without hindrance." The citizenship dilemma, notes Pakulski (1997:73; see also Weeks 1999:37), is to balance "the content and scope of claimed [citizenship] rights" with "rights that are recognized as legitimate by the state and effectively sanctioned." This challenge of full democratic citizenship is how to confer legal, political, economic, and cultural rights on all citizens.

Second, and related to the first, are issues of tolerance for culturally diverse populations. Who determines what is appropriate or responsible citizenship in Provincetown? How far are citizens willing to push tolerance boundaries to confer full citizenship rights for sexual minorities (or for others outside the heteronormative, white, or Eurocentric mainstream), whose conduct they may not like? Mouffe (1992) argues that this dilemma is an outcome of the challenge of reconciling liberal commitments to collective rights, such as economic and social equality or universal social justice, with individual rights and the rights of pluralistic groups. The problem, then, notes Mouffe (1992:12, 14), is between democracy and liberalism. Mouffe concludes that, "Between the democratic logic of identity and equivalence and the liberal logic of pluralism and difference, the experience of a radical and plural democracy can only consist in the recognition of the multiplicity of social logics and the necessity of their articulation." The "radical democratic" project, notes Mouffe, is achieved only at some personal and social costs giving rise to "conflict, division and antagonism." Provincetown offers instructive lessons in how to bring about this "radical democratic project," that affirms the social, economic, political, and cultural rights of plural groups, as it overcomes the divisiveness brought about when they intersect.

A third dilemma of citizenship faced by communities of diversity, including Provincetown, is the per-

sistent and near-universal problem of how to break down group boundaries to build connections across the social and cultural divide. This process is laborious and difficult because conflicts periodically erupt to undermine social harmony, giving rise to social discord, distrust, and xenophobia. Social conflicts, sometimes seemingly trivial and at other times formidable, destabilize social homeostasis, as members retreat into familiar spaces defined by their own comfortable status as “insider” versus “outsider.” Identity-defined groups—whether racial, ethnic, sexual, or gender-based—bring their unique class ethos and vested social interests to social encounters, and to overcome group boundaries members must cross over and embrace one another: that folks “go along to get along.” Group members must build, not enclaves of isolation, but bridges of connection substantial enough to overcome biases, prejudices, homophobia, anti-Semitism, racism, xenophobia, or other ethnocentrism.

Bridging the Sexual Divide

Provincetowners meander through a landmine of social differences using a variety of effective and, I will argue, essential inter-group culture building strategies. First, social encounters are diverse and multi-layered, occurring across geographic and social landscapes: on Provincetown’s streets, among neighbors, at church, in fund raising events, and in local theatres, bars, and clubs. Social groups are not geographically ghettoized, as they are in many multi-constituency communities. In Provincetown’s intimate small town atmosphere, folks interact in political and social arenas, personally and formally, throughout the ebb and flow of daily life. The drag queen, like Pearlene who performs at the A-House, may live next door to an elderly straight Portuguese couple; may be active in a religious or social club; or volunteer in community fund-raising events. The “tough” butch dyke lesbian babysits for a straight couple’s children, or performs community service at the local soup kitchen or the Provincetown AIDS Support Group. Monolithic gender stereotypes, then, are shattered by routinized, richly textured “in your face” social encounters which break down walls of difference. Local straights gab on the Town Hall benches, kibbitz at bingo, walk the police beat, direct traffic, manage the hot dog stand, pharmacy, Portuguese bakery, and Sunset Inn, seldom intimidated by flamboyant, rule-breaking conduct that swirls around them. In fact, even Provincetown’s youth sense that Provincetown’s wealth is its diverse citizenry; that an enduring feature is its inclusivity; and that Provincetown’s future rests in building community across the sexual divide.

Second, although social groups in town are sexually diverse, sexual “otherness” is de-mystified through intimate face-to-face contacts. Some locals, as earlier argued, themselves dabble in “queer” at drag shows, gay disco clubs, and at the annual Carnival Parade. Unlike racial or ethnic ghettos, Provincetowners live side by side as neighbors and friends, familiar with each other’s lifestyles and idiosyncrasies. Furthermore, the base metaphor of “getting along,” so pervasive among locals, persists as a salient core idiom in the local imaginary.

Third, community problem-solving strategies are built on long-standing democratic New England town meeting institutional structures, laced with civil libertarian attitudes. Since the early twentieth century, and notable in the 1960s when the community faced an “invasion” of hippies (then called beatniks), citizens have consistently expressed a “live and let live” philosophy. For example, in 1965, sixty residents signed a petition aimed at restricting unwelcome “beatniks” in order to “preserve the good name of Provincetown.” In response, then-town manager Robert A. Hancock and then-police chief Francis H. Marshall, argued that merely because citizens object to the un-kept appearance of beatniks, they could not deny them civil rights. Marshall’s 1965 comments endure:

We have many characters who need a shave, bath and who run around with long hair, sometimes referred to as nonconformists. If they choose to rebel against society in personal hygiene, that’s all right, as long as they do not become nonconformists to our laws Until then, they are protected by the Constitution. To legislate or make laws to harass a minority group to which someone objects is in complete violation of the 14th Amendment. (Provincetown *Banner* 2000).

Similar sentiments were at the heart of the town’s 1990s community policing model introduced by former police chief Robert Anthony and town manager Keith Bergman. This “live and let live” attitude allows Provincetowners to accommodate to sexual pluralities and non-heteronormative lifestyles. “Marching to a different drummer” is, simply, not a crime in Provincetown. This does not, however, signify that “anything goes.”

Sexual Citizenship and Tolerance Boundaries

Sexual citizenship interrogates how far citizens are willing to go to promote political, legal, economic, and cultural rights for all citizens, regardless of sexual identity. Provincetowners have conferred legal rights to sexual minorities through various by-

laws and resolutions, including a domestic partnership by-law and registry, and a Hate Crimes Resolution. Sexual minorities, too, have entered the mainstream of Provincetown political life, serving on numerous town boards and committees. Provincetowners have also confronted dilemmas of sexual citizenship in economic and cultural arenas, fostering sometimes contentious debates over equality and levels of tolerance for non-heteronormative lifestyles. Debates persisted in the late 1990s and early 21st century over use of the town's tourism funds for explicitly gay and lesbian events, including a December event called Holly Folly and Mates Leather Weekend in October. Similar public outcries over public cabaret nudity at the Crown & Anchor Cabaret Room and nude bathing on the town's "spaghetti strip" beach reveal how lifestyle differences foreground the social divide and how Provincetowners reconcile individual and collective citizenship rights, duties, and responsibilities.

Provincetown, as earlier noted, relies substantially on tourism for its livelihood. In 1997 a majority of Provincetown's then-predominantly straight board of selectmen voted to allow the use of tourism funds to promote Holly Folly, a December weekend aimed to attract gay and lesbian tourists. Some citizens were outraged, and then-Chamber of Commerce President, Robert Harrison, promptly resigned from the town's Visitor's Services Board in protest. Charging that the decision was "immoral" and the event "divisive," selectperson Mary-Jo Avellar cast the single vote against the proposal. She said, "I see serious problems with this. . . . Anything we promote in Provincetown with taxpayers' money should be for everybody who lives here no matter what their sexual orientation is. We have to stop looking at ourselves as gay or straight" (Miller 1997a:1). The event, noted its originator Lynette Molnar (1997), was intended to both extend the town's tourism season and fill a void in the lives of gay men and lesbians. She said,

The feedback we got from our out-of-town guests, customers and friends was that the holidays are hard for many people in the gay and lesbian community, that we need holiday celebrations, they don't exist anywhere in this country, and that Provincetown is the perfect place to start the tradition. Holly Folly was conceived as a way to extend the season for all Provincetown businesses—gay and straight—and as a special celebration for the national gay and lesbian community.

Another local resident, Jonathan Sinaiko (1998), called the sponsorship a symptom of an "ever-increasing trend to ghettoize the community." He said, "I can't help but wonder how the community and the general public would respond if the Provincetown

Portuguese Festival were billed as the 'Provincetown Portuguese Heterosexual Festival' with a disclaimer clarifying that gays and lesbians are welcome."

Provincetowners, mindful of the economic benefits of an expanded tourism season—and with an ever-increasing gay and lesbian population—weathered the storm of controversy and finally endorsed the Holly Folly December Stroll as a permanent feature of their annual tourist calendar. Today Holly Folly is part of a vibrant (although often chilly) December holiday tourist season. Local resident Alice Joseph (1997) said,

Mary Heaton Vorse said it best, "Provincetown is like an onion"—many layers tightly packed into one ball, but each layer remains separate. This is how these diverse groups occupy this three miles of sand in relative peace. We share the same town and however eclectic, we are one community.

It only works when one group does not try to dominate and exclude the others. The rendition of the Portuguese Blessing of the Fleet in June is fun. The Carnival Parade this Thursday should be fun. A Christmas or Festival of Lights stroll could be fun.

As [then] selectman [Henry] Evans said, 'The color is green.'

The nettle of Provincetowners was again tested when the town in 2002 decided to allocate \$2,000 to fund another annual event called Mates Leather Weekend, which targets people who practice the "leather lifestyle." Adding to the controversy was internet publicity (including photos) surrounding the group's sponsorship of an annual "master/slave" auction, an AIDS fundraising event. According to media accounts, "[s]everal photographs . . . available on the internet show naked buttocks, one man's pubic hair, pants unzipped and pulled down, and at least five partially clad people seemingly hanging from chains" (Bragg 2002a). The sexually explicit, on-the-edge, and randy nature of the event prompted numerous letters to the media by outraged citizens. Said Estherann Czyoski (2002), "[w]e have chosen to sponsor an event that takes place entirely in a barroom setting, excludes members of our community, and displays a crotch as its logo. At the same time we have significantly reduced our financial support for the arts. This is a disgrace and I hope that it's not a sign of where we are headed." Said another outraged citizen, Brunetta R. Wolfman (2002), ". . . the VSB [Visitors Service Board] has lost sight of the diversity which attracted many of us to the town. If the VSB . . . cannot think of themes to attract visitors why not consider some of the following: a romantic weekend with some one else's spouse; an amateur photographers' weekend; a silver-haired seniors weekend with

advertising in *Modern Maturity* “A Provincetown Banner (2002) editorial summed up the controversy and placed the issue squarely in the context of two competing interests: community identity and citizenship rights on the one hand, and the economic draw of tourism on the other:

It's safe to say there aren't a lot of small towns discussing whether to allocate public funds to support an annual October event called Leather Mates Weekend, and it says something about Provincetown's open-mindedness that such a request for funding is not only considered, but granted We're not passing judgment here. The question is: what does the allotment of tourism funds say about the town and what it wants to be? Provincetown has fully embraced tourism as its main industry, and the impulse to support off-season activities of all stripes seems like a healthy one. But because so much hard work has been done over the past decade to make the town more welcoming, it might be a good idea to revisit the topic of what, exactly, that means and how best to accomplish it. Events such as Leather Mates, or Fantasia Fair, or Bears Week, or any others of similarly narrow focus, are certainly welcome in Provincetown and add to the fabric of this community. But that doesn't necessarily mean they're deserving of public funds.

Provincetown had indeed moved far toward embracing citizenship rights for diverse sexual minorities, including “sexual outlaws.” However, as sexual minorities pushed the boundaries of sexualized conduct into Provincetown's public arenas, citizens railed against embracing a radically permissive “live and let live” philosophy.

Queer “Counterintimacies” and the Limits of Tolerance

Provincetown, like New York's Fire Island Cherry Grove (see Newton 1993) community, another predominantly gay and lesbian resort mecca, is a site where more than nude musical revues and nude bathing are practiced. Provincetown, like Cherry Grove is a site of “counterpublic queer culture” where “border intimacies” (see Berlant and Warner 1998) interrogate sexual propriety boundaries and social acceptability standards. Newton (1993) described how Cherry Grove has long been a counter-heteronormative “queer” space permissive of non-standard intimacies. David Bergman (1999:100) said, “Men dancing together in public, kissing in public, holding hands in public, these are many of the activities unselfconsciously performed on Fire Island, which are highly policed outside of the Island.” Ac-

cording to Newton, by the late-1960s, following an era of police crackdowns and raids, anonymous sexual trysts between gay men were commonplace and tolerated in Cherry Grove. Such activities were, Bergman notes, “a significant part of the entire issue of how to define [Cherry Grove as] gay space.” With a “queer” majority, Cherry Grovers endorsed a radically permissive attitude toward “out” public sex between gay men.

Provincetowners, like Grovers, struggle with how to accommodate the extremes of non-heteronormativity, such as public sex, s & m, and other aspects of queer culture. Provincetown also wrests with how to maintain a pluralistic cultural ethos, even as the community moves closer to becoming a “gay ghetto.” Provincetown's “queer spaces,” as in Cherry Grove, are its mostly gay male sexual spaces, including venues for cruising and consensual sex, drag performance sites, and the everyday eroticized street culture itself. Public sex, whether on Provincetown's dunes, at the “dick dock” behind Flyer's Boatyard, or more recently, beneath the Commercial Street Boatyard Motel's waterfront deck, like prostitution among straights, is problematic because it renders to the public sphere those intimate activities normally relegated to the private sphere of the bedroom. Furthermore, these sites, such as neighborhood beaches, formerly belonged to straights, further dramatizing the public/private, straight/gay cleavage. According to Berlant and Warner (1998:560), “The spillage of eroticism into everyday social life seems transgressive in a way that provokes normal aversion, a hygienic recoil even as contemporary consumer and media cultures increasingly trope toiletward, splattering the matter of intimate life at the highest levels of national culture.” Not only is “queer” the antithesis of the good gay citizen, but also “queer” in public contradicts the public/private divide and patriarchal, heteronormative notions of “intimacy, coupling, and family.”

Provincetowners under former police chief Robert Anthony took a relatively permissive stand on public gay sex. Anthony liberally interpreted the town's sexual morals bylaws, avoided “entrapment” of public sex law offenders, and resisted coming down hard on men who congregated for sex unless they were a public nuisance. When Anthony retired in 2001, the town appointed a non-native, Ted Meyer, to take over the job. Meyer, a seasoned police veteran and straight, with little experience with sexually diverse populations, has implemented what he describes as a “customer friendly” policing program. Cited by Bragg (2001), Meyer said, “[o]n the issue of how Provincetown police should handle gay men congregating in the West End of town for anonymous sex, Meyer acknowledged his inexperience with that kind of situation, but said that ‘gay bashing’ wouldn't

be tolerated and that specific complaints would be addressed.”

In May 2002, Provincetown police conducted a raid at 2:15 A.M. on the newest site for sexual trysts between gay men—beneath the Commercial Street Boatyard Motel deck—rousting forty or fifty men who quickly vacated the area. Meyer displayed a liberal permissive attitude reminiscent of his predecessor, former chief Anthony: “Chief Meyer will tell you straight out that public sexual activity, in and of itself, where privacy can be reasonably expected, is by no means illegal. But there are issues of property damage, disorderly conduct, disturbance of neighborhood peace and financial liability when large groups gather for sexual activity” (Bragg 2002b). The problem of sexual trysts under the Boatslip deck was finally resolved when owners installed spotlights to deter the gatherings.

Policing Provincetown’s streets confronts squarely the intersection of sexual cultures over sexual citizenship rights, interrogating how far Provincetowners—straights and gays—are willing to go to protect citizenship rights for all citizens, including those whose lifestyle is on the edge of sexual propriety and social acceptability.

Demographic Changes and New Challenges

Change is inevitable in Provincetown, as elsewhere. In the early 21st century subtle shifts in the face of Provincetown—an increasing number of up-scale tourists and high-end guesthouses, more extreme boundary-crossing sexual conduct, and an ever-more formidable rift between wealthy and poor—have fostered a backlash against the social and sexual permissiveness long part of the Provincetown scene. Gay male party circuit gatherings during July 4th weekends in the summer of 2001 and 2002 brought thousands of young gay men to Provincetown, many sporting muscular physiques apparently augmented with steroids (Rose 2002). Increased AIDS cases—over 225 new cases in 2001 alone—and drug overdoses signaled that tourists (and perhaps year rounders, too) were pushing social and sexual boundaries, taxing not only local services but also tolerance and patience levels of year rounders (Allis 2001). As seasonal condominium conversions further depleted affordable housing stocks, some Provincetowners blamed the excesses on the seasonal crowd and charged, “Enough is enough!” Town clerk Stephan Nofield, cited by Healy (2002:B5), said, “People don’t want to put up with the excesses as much anymore The cost of housing has exploded. Unemployment is high. The late-night partying adds tension.” Local tolerance for nudity, the party scene, and rule-breaking generally was on

the wane. Said Healy (2002:B5), “For some year round residents, it’s law-and-order time.”

Today Provincetown’s delicate social balance is threatened most pervasively by economic gentrification, which endangers the survivability of all but the most well-heeled citizens. With an economy dependent almost solely on tourism, its fishing industry in decline, and with no other industry alternatives, Provincetown has few other employment-generating options. Elsewhere (Faiman-Silva 2004), I describe the negative economic effects of rapidly increasing property values, escalating housing costs, and few skilled jobs. Two by-products of this trend have been the use of foreign service workers and “straight flight” to neighboring Truro. How the community will buck these current trends toward gentrification, condominium conversion, and the demise of a viable middle- and working class, is difficult to discern.

Old Contests, New Journeys: The Future of a Diverse Provincetown

A truly radical resolution of the multiple and intersecting realities of gay versus straight spaces in Provincetown, Gorman (2000:219) says, requires a “concept of the city as a political community that is able to accommodate to the fact of otherness and diversity.” Gorman (2000:225) calls this a politics of conciliation which embraces full radical alterity. Provincetowners have indeed striven to achieve just such a politics of conciliation at many junctures in the twentieth century. Their affirmative and proactive stands to counter hate crimes, adopt anti-bias curricula, legalize same sex unions, pass human rights resolutions, and integrate sexual minorities into virtually every social arena, speak to the courage Provincetowners have shown to build bridges of connection across the sexual divide. Provincetowners who cue up at Carnival Parade or Drag Bingo radically embrace “queer culture,” thereby affirming that social boundaries are fluid and permeable.

Provincetowners, by embracing sexual diversity, fostered by intimate ‘in your face’ social encounters and the routinization of diversity, have created the opportunity for a truly liberated community culture. Although the future of Provincetown’s rich sexually diverse population remains uncertain, the lessons this community’s history convey are durable. Provincetowners still cling to a base metaphor of tolerance and acceptance, pervaded by a willingness to debate, discuss, and weigh alternative and sometimes irreconcilable points of view. The streets of Provincetown today are still magnets for seasonal tourists and year-rounders seeking a respite from the frenetic pace of mainstream culture, and as a respite from homophobia and intolerance “over the bridge.” The challenge of Provincetown will be to retain its

rich sexual, gender, ethnic, and cultural diversity, as it resolves problems of economic gentrification, economic exclusivity, a segmented workforce, and lack of affordable housing. How the community will incorporate new social groups, particularly workers

of color, will signal whether lessons in sexual diversity can be translated into a broader cultural transformation, which embraces both sexual equality and multiracialism.

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